

# Traditional Home Service

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September

## OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you;  
and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

## PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:  
Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.  
Open our lips, Lord:  
and we shall praise your name.

## HYMN 1 (Amazing Grace)

**READINGS** – Philippians 1.21-30  
Matthew 20.1-16

## TALK

## CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
**Amen.**

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.*

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## HYMN 2 (Be Thou My Vision)

## CONCLUSION

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;  
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**

## HYMNS TO USE

### 1. Amazing Grace

Amazing grace how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost but now am found  
Was blind but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
And grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

Through many dangers toils and snares  
I have already come  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far  
And grace will lead me home

When we've been there ten thousand  
years  
Bright shining as the sun  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun

### 2. Be Thou My Vision

Be Thou my vision  
O Lord of my heart  
Naught be all else to me  
Save that Thou art  
Thou my best thought  
By day or by night  
Waking or sleeping  
Thy presence my light

Be Thou my wisdom  
Be Thou my true Word  
I ever with Thee  
And Thou with me Lord  
Thou my great Father  
I Thy true son  
Thou in me dwelling  
And I with Thee one

Be Thou my shield  
And my sword for the fight  
Be Thou my dignity  
Be Thou my might  
Thou my soul's shelter  
And Thou my high tow'r  
Raise Thou me heav'nward  
O pow'r of my pow'r

High King of heaven  
When vict'ry is won  
May I reach heaven's joys  
O bright heaven's Sun  
Heart of my own heart  
Whatever befall  
Still be my vision  
O Ruler of all

## TALK – Matthew 20.1-16: Celebrating God's Unfair Grace

Have you ever felt like something was unfair?... Most of us have a strong sense of what we think is right or wrong and we can react really strongly when we feel that something is unfair...

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel, we heard Jesus tell the parable of the workers in the vineyard. This is a story that has a tone of 'it's not fair!' running through it, especially for the people who had been working in the vineyard the longest...and perhaps we can understand why they felt that way. Let's put ourselves in their shoes...imagine, you've worked really hard all day, and while other people pitched in at points, they've not worked as long or as hard as you have. The end of the day rolls round, and you find that those who have only put in an hour's work get paid first...and not only that, but they get paid exactly the same wage as you for the day's work. Surely that's not fair! Who are these other workers to think they're entitled to the same as you? Surely you deserve more! What kind of crazy business is your boss running? This isn't fair!

As Jesus reminds us right at the beginning of the parable, this story isn't about business choices and fair wages in a literal sense. Jesus tells this story to teach us something about the kingdom of heaven. And so, this story is about how God gives grace and mercy to all his people, no matter how long they've served him or how deserving or undeserving we think they might be. This story is about how wildly generous and outrageous God's grace is. God's grace goes beyond what we in all our humanness might consider to be right or wrong, and so in a sense God's grace isn't fair – but that's a really good thing! The unfairness of God's grace is something we should celebrate, and that's what we're going to think a bit about this morning.

Most of us know, don't we, that thankfully God does not treat us as we really deserve. The Bible tells us that the wage of sin is death – all of us sin and get things wrong so therefore we deserve the consequences of our sin. But the Bible also says that while the wage of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life. And so, because of Jesus's once-and-for-all sacrifice for us, we've been forgiven, and we don't have to bear the punishment for our sins. And because of Jesus, we have the gift of God's grace and the hope of eternal life with him. None of us truly deserve that, so it is unfair that God is so gracious

towards us. But God's grace is a gift he freely gives us and, so the unfairness of God's grace is something we should celebrate!

And we see this in our parable for today... As we heard, the parable begins with the landowner (who represents God) going out early in the morning to hire some workers for his vineyard. Both parties agree that the landowner will pay these workers one denarius for their work – at the time, this would have been about the average pay for a day's work, and the workers hired at the start of the day were happy to work for this price.

While these people begin their days work, the landowner continues to go out searching for even more workers. He does this at least four times throughout the day, with the last group of workers hired just an hour before the end of the working day. With the first group of hired workers, the landowner agrees to pay them one denarius, but with all the others hired throughout the day he just agrees to pay them 'whatever is fair' for their work. So, naturally, we would expect the workers who worked a shorter day to be paid less – that would seem fair, wouldn't it? Their payment should reflect how much time and work they've put in.

But this is where the plot twist comes – when the end of the day rolls round, the landowner begins by paying the last hired workers first...and he pays them one denarius. That seems very generous...and because of this, v10 tells us that those who had worked the longest day expected to receive more. But as we know, the landowner paid all his workers equally, regardless of how much work or time they ended up giving.

Those who have worked the longest start to moan that it isn't fair – and I don't know about you, but to be honest I find it quite easy to sympathise with their feelings! But, in God's kingdom, the last will be first, and those who think they should be first will be last. It doesn't matter how long we have been following Jesus, or how much 'work' we might have done for God – the gift of grace and eternal life is something God offers to all his people generously, without any kind of discrimination.

But sometimes, I think we can fall into the trap of being a bit like the first group of workers in the story, or at least I can anyway. Sometimes we can look at how God shows grace and mercy to other people and think 'what about me, don't I deserve more than them?' Sometimes we can end up feeling like God

owes us certain treatment because of the time or work we think we've put in in doing things for God, or how well we've behaved. This kind of attitude reminds me a bit of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son, who gets angry when the younger brother is welcomed home by the loving father. He says, 'what about me, I've worked hard and stayed faithful to you all this time – why is my brother the one being rewarded?'. The older brother feels like the father owes him something because of how he's behaved.

When I was a lot younger, I used to find it really hard when God seemed to be blessing people who had hurt me, or who I thought weren't living in the way I thought they should. That would be a time when I would say 'it's not fair!'. And God had to do some work in my heart around that. I grew up around a lot of teaching that put emphasis on things I needed to do in order to be right with God. But that's not how grace works. Yes, we are called to be faithful to God and that definitely has implications for how we live. But God's grace is not dependent on things we do for ourselves. We are not saved by our own efforts, but by faith through grace. It's all about what Jesus has done for us, not what we do for ourselves or even what we do for him.

And as this parable says, we shouldn't be jealous because God is generous with his grace. We don't need to be jealous when others receive forgiveness and mercy. Instead, we should celebrate with them!

One of the details I love in this parable is that it says in V7 that the landowner hires people that nobody else wanted to employ. He spends all day going out and searching for these kinds of people. And that's what God is like – he searches out those who are ignored and unwelcomed by the rest of society and he offers them a place in his kingdom, welcoming them on the same terms and extending to them the same grace that has been offered to everyone else.

There will no doubt be people in God's kingdom that we find it hard to love, perhaps we even question how they've ended up here. And we can end up judging people that maybe behave a bit differently to us, or rejecting those who don't meet our own expectations. But it's not our place to decide who is worthy of God's grace and mercy, because the truth is that none of us are. None of us are truly worthy of God's grace. But amazingly, God offers it to us anyway. And just as the landowner in the parable had the right to choose to use his money in whatever

way he sees fit, God has the right to choose to give his grace to whoever he wants whenever he wants, even when we think it doesn't seem fair! Our job is not to compare or question or grumble, but to try and remain faithful to God, and to celebrate with anyone who encounters the gift of God's grace. God doesn't want people to miss out on gift of grace, and neither should we.

As I've been thinking about all this this week, it reminded me of a story about my dad. I think it illustrates something about experiencing God's grace and not getting grumpy when others receive it. One day my dad went to a convention linked to his job. And he had a whale of a time! He came back with all kinds of free gifts he'd collected throughout the day – pens, bags, trinkets, hats (I'm not exaggerating when I say he came back with over 20 different free hats!), he even won a big remote control crane toy on one stall...there were all kinds of gifts he came back with, and he loved it! He happily received the gifts that were being freely and generously offered to him. When he came home and showed me all this stuff, I was horrified! Why had he taken all this stuff? He didn't need it all, I didn't think it was very fair of him to take it all – I was really embarrassed! But he had the best day and was thrilled with all the things he'd generously been given for free – and he ended up giving lots of it away and blessing other people with it.

Why have I told you that story? Well, I think experiencing God's grace can be a bit like that day my dad had at his work convention – enjoying the blessings that are being freely and generously given to us, even if we don't really deserve them. It's about receiving the gift, celebrating it, but also sharing it with those around us, just like how my dad gave a lot of what he received away. Don't be like I was in that example! Don't get grumpy or judge people for receiving and enjoying the blessings of God's grace. It's not up to us to decide what's right or fair when it comes to God's grace.

Because God's grace can't be earned or stored up. God's grace isn't a reward for our good behaviour or achievements. We are not saved by our works, but by faith through grace. And such outrageous, generous, unfair grace is a gift from God. A gift that wholly depends on what Jesus has done for us, and not anything we do. We don't deserve it, and so in that sense, God's grace is unfair. But thank God that his grace is unfair! This is something we should celebrate!